

SLTFD decorated engine brings good cheer



The annual South Lake Tahoe fire holiday truck begins its rounds tonight. Photo/Provided

By Kathryn Reed

There's a certain sound this time of year that brings a smile to kids of all ages – the holiday fire engine making the rounds of South Shore streets.

This annual tradition with South Lake Tahoe and Lake Valley fire departments goes back decades. It's something youngsters look forward to – though some adults seem just as excited.

"There are always kids who are extremely excited to see Santa and then the ones who are scared," South Lake firefighter

Danny Vallejo told *Lake Tahoe News*. "For local people like myself and Capt. Tyler Jack who grew up here, this is a tradition we are pretty fond of."

In South Tahoe the decorated vehicle started in the Public Works Department. Employees would drive around city streets with a little house on the back of a flatbed truck, with Santa in the house.

The Lake Valley tradition dates to the mid-1960s. Fire Chief Tim Alameda remembers getting his candy cane from Santa. That's all the history that department has about the truck.

About 20 years ago the South Lake Tahoe Firefighters' Association took over the responsibility of the city's tradition. For three years they kept things the same as Public Works.

Then the firefighters started decorating a fire engine and driving it around town. Everyone on the decorated truck is volunteering their time.

That same year the house never left Station 2. However, that is where Santa would be. (Three years ago the department stopped staffing Santa's house because the reserve program was disbanded and that job fell to them.)

Santa is now on the fire truck handing out the candy canes. His arrival is hard to miss as Christmas tunes can be heard before the lights are even visible in most neighborhoods.

"This year we are going to be decorating one of our brush rigs," Vallejo said. Various apparatuses have been used throughout the years.

It takes more than 75 strands of lights to illuminate the vehicle. Plus, the reindeer made out of thick wire are all aglow. The truck is wrapped in such a manner that all the compartments can be accessed in case it is called into action.

New this season is the crew on board will be taking pictures of youngsters they meet. Those photos will be posted on the agency's Facebook and Twitter pages as they drive along. The firefighters are hoping people will tag themselves to spread the cheer a little further.



Firefighters decorate the South Lake Tahoe engine. Photo/Provided

Here is the South Lake Tahoe fire engine schedule:

- Dec. 10 – Tahoe Keys/Venice
- Dec. 11 – Glenwood
- Dec. 12 – Keys Boulevard/state streets
- Dec. 13 – Barton/Tahoe Island
- Dec. 14 – South Y /Tata
- Dec. 15 – Al Tahoe Boulevard
- Dec. 16 – Springwood/Bijou Pines
- Dec. 17 – Sierra Boulevard
- Dec. 18 – Ski Run area
- Dec. 19 – Heavenly Valley
- Dec. 20 – Stateline/Pioneer Trail
- Dec. 21 – Gardner Mountain
- Dec. 22 – Stateline hotels
- Dec. 23 – Main areas

Dec. 24 – Highway 50.